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to standardize by the application of what are known as minimum essentials in English composition, grade by grade, through the grammar school and the high school. When colleges find out what the schools are doing—many colleges no doubt know well already—there will be a possibility of carrying the principle through one or two years of the college course and of reaching a general agreement which will enable colleges to do a more intelligent kind of teaching in the circumstances in which they find themselves. It may also be possible to ascertain and state definite and comprehensible objectives to be aimed at in various stages in the study of literature. This would of course require co-operation from the grade schools and the high schools.

Other suggestions of subjects proper for consideration by the College Section of the English Council will be welcome.

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ON (OR OF) PREPOSITIONS

Dorothy, a little friend of mine who is teaching her first year in a city high school, asked me to look over some Junior themes that she had been grading. "First, I want you to tell me if the subject-matter of the themes is 'live.' Miss S—, the head of the English Department, has demanded that all theme-subjects be 'live and timely,' so you see I have had my students write on current events. Second, I want to know if the construction of these themes, with my illuminating corrections and suggestions, is all right."

I found that the subject-matter was decidedly "live": "The League of Nations as a Political Force in American Politics," "The Fairness of Senator Borah's Criticism of the League," "The Justness of Clemenceau's Demands," "The Reasons for the Italian Claims." Truly, all of these subjects were not only "live," but timely and interesting. Several of them would be worthy subjects for a master's thesis in the field of political science. The footnotes were given; all quoted passages were so designated. On the whole, the subject-matter was O.K., considering the fact that the material had been gathered and organized by sixteen-year-old boys and girls. And so I could justly praise the subject-matter to Dorothy.

"Now tell me about the construction."

I saw that the proper nouns were coupled with well-behaved verbs, traveling in an harmonious company of melodic adverbs and tuneful adjectives; but the prepositions struck discordant notes, notes that

would irritate the sensitive ear of the average English teacher. They jarred and jangled and wouldn't keep step with their partners on the right. They upset my nerves, ruffled my temper, and brushed off the cobwebs, so that I could remember past puzzlements. Did I get off *of* the train? Did I get off *from* the train? Or, did I just get off the train? Is it, I shall be *to*¹ home this evening; or, I shall be *at* home this evening? Which is correct? I shall have to go *in* the house for a minute, or, I shall have to go *into* the house for a minute? Oh, these balky *from*'s, these provoking *to*'s, these aggravating *at*'s, these perplexing *in*'s, and these obstreperous *into*'s! Why is there not a good old rule for their use as there is for the *an, auf, hinter, in, neben, über, unter, vor, and zwischen*? (Forgive the unpatriotic reference.) Occasionally, if talking a bit rapidly, I find myself misusing prepositions. Oh, for a good rule for the use of *in* and *into* like the spelling maxim: "*i* before *e*, except after *c*, or, when sounded as *a*, as in neighbor and weigh."

Dorothy's students showed by their themes that they found prepositions difficult. In its scant four pages, Johnny's fine theme on "The Justness of Clemenceau's Demands," in spite of its correct footnotes and clear reasoning, had seven errors in the use of prepositions. Mary's illuminating theme on "Shall the Returned Soldier Continue His High School Work?" was three pages in length and contained five prepositional errors.

"I don't seem to be able to teach them the correct use of prepositions," said Dorothy, after I had called her attention to these errors. "I have assigned the Woolley rules over and over, and yet the children are constantly making mistakes. What shall I do?"

I thought of a remedy. When I was taking my first course in French at college, my instructor wrote each day on the blackboard a French expression or sentence. This was to be committed to memory and to be used at least five times in conversation outside of class by each student before the next recitation. On the mind of each of us students he impressed the fact that everything learned in the classroom should be applied to everyday life; and also that all learning should be a pleasure rather than a pain, and that the only way it could be a pleasure was for one to be the master of learning. Soon all of us French I students were using such expressions as: *S'il vous plait, N'est ce pas? Comprenez-vous? Qu'est ce que cela veut dire?* From these simple expressions we gradually learned to converse in French. I am sure that several of the

¹ The Pennsylvania Dutch children always make this error. It must be caused by their literal translation of *zu Hause*.

boys in that class who are now American officers in France thank their lucky stars that they can converse ably in French.

I believe that the high-school students can learn to use correctly these puzzling prepositions, if the same method is followed. A correctly used preposition in a good sentence that is committed to memory ought to help the student along the thorny paths of prepositions. As soon as the student knows he is speaking correctly, he will take pride in his accomplishment.

Then, too, the teacher can always explain to her composition classes that great writers have often had difficulty with prepositions. The letter dated February 2, 1886, from James Russell Lowell to William Dean Howells is a good illustration.

But I won't let you say (when you reprint) as you do on P. 5, 1st col. "bring us in closer relations;" for that isn't what you mean. You don't mean "bring in to us" but "bring us into"—that's what you mean. I am going to get up a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Prepositions. Animals have a certain natural means of defense. They can bite and Prepositions can't. The society will be immitigable. It will spare neither age nor sex, and will be happiest when dancing a war-dance on the broken ties of friendship.

Dorothy laughed. "I believe I can give my students a remedy," she said. Stepping to the blackboard, she wrote a sentence containing the obstreperous *into* used correctly. "That is the first spoonful of the remedy," she rippled, "the dose that they will have to take tomorrow."

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